

Mrs. Kyeong-Sook CHA

Defector from North Korea, Victim & Witness to Trafficking of North Korean Females including her own daughters in China

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Human Trafficking, its Pain and the Current Situation

The Food Distribution Center in Pyongyang stopped distributing food at the end of June 1995.

After being discharged from the Army, I worked as a district leader. I began to worry we would all die of starvation if we just waited for food distribution from the government, which never came.

I had so much to do as the district leader during the days, and had to work every night to make tofu with beans. I sold tofu to buy corns, with which I fed my children. Sometimes, I went up the hills around Pyongyang and picked wild grasses to augment our corn meals.

In May 1996, my son came back from school complaining he could not see clearly. He lied down on the floor. I ran to the local clinic for help. They told me my son had grass poisoning, but they did not have any medicine for him. I tried to clean my son's stomach with rice water and mung-bean gruel. My son recovered in about a month, but it was a living hell. He still has scars on his arms from that sickness. I cannot recollect the time without tears. He was lucky. I heard about an old woman who lost her nose from the grass poisoning.

Only then, I realized we were living on poison like many others in the city. I could not wait to get poisoned to death. I told my oldest daughter to take an antique bowl and go to Moosan. I thought she could trade it for rice.

One month passed and I did not hear from my daughter. I was so worried I left my 12-year old son to my husband and left the house with my younger daughter to find my older daughter. I found out my daughter could not sell the antique bowl, and went to China to make money. It was in October 1997. I jumped into Tumen River. The water was bitter cold, but I did not care. I had to go to China to find my daughter. I held tight my younger daughter's hand in the cold river.

We were in China now. We met some nice people. They took us in and fed us. They even gave us some dresses to change. I explained how my older daughter looked like. They said they never saw her. Much later, I found out all Chinese living close to the border were all involved in human trafficking. They were all crazy. They bought and sold North Korean girls with the help of North Koreans.

I was desperate to find my daughter, but I ran into a dead end. I could not turn around and go home... I went from village to village looking for my daughter. I was hired as a maid in Hwa Ryong City. I thought I was hired as a maid, but when I got to the house where I was supposed to work as a maid, there were five North Korean girls in that household.

The beast in that household slept with this and that girl every night right next to his wife. There was a 16-year old girl who resisted the rape. The beast put a wrench into her private part. Blood poured out of that little girl's private part down to her legs. I could not watch, but this kind of barbaric atrocity happened almost everyday.

After a week, I went out to get some groceries. When I came back, my younger daughter was not home. The beast said he did not know where my daughter was. Now I lost both my daughters! I went from house to house in Hwa Ryong City asking about my two daughters...I went to Yenji...I went to Ryong Jeong....Nobody knew or saw my daughters. Everybody eventually found out everything that happened in China. My daughter was sold by the Beast to somewhere in Heilong Jiang. I learned about it much later.

I cried everyday. A Korean-Chinese man approached me. He suggested that he would buy back my daughter if I worked for him at his house. I had no choice. He bought back my daughter for 4,000 Yuan (\$400), and we worked for him as servants at his house. We worked on his farm during the day, and slept in cow's stable at night. We literally lived like animals and lived with animals. I was happy, though, that I was able to be with my daughter.

The man was 10 years younger than I was at the time. He became my master and husband eventually. He ordered me to cultivate a mountainside into a farmland, approx. 5,000 Pyung (about 3 acres). He did not work, but drank everyday. When he got drunk, he beat us. He wanted to fight with me. He would say, "I will sleep with your daughter if I win. I will sleep with you if you win." He turned into a beast and did horrible things. He would try to bite off my nipple. I wanted to hang myself so many times if it were not for my daughter.

One day in May 1999, I was watching TV after a long day at the farm. Several ruffians came and tried to take us. We fought back like mad, and a few people in the village came to help. We escaped at the time, but eventually were kidnapped by the human traffickers two months later on July 2, around 11:00 at night. We tried to escape through the window, but they pushed a dagger into my breast. I was more horrified than in pain. I knew I was going to be sold again. We were taken to a market place in Hwa Rong City, and were sold to some place in Inner Mongolia for 10,000 Yuan (\$1,200). I wanted to die. They did not care. When we arrived at Bok Dong in Hwa Ryong City, there were some gangsters waiting to snatch us. A fight broke out between them. We ran away. They all came after us. Someone called the Chinese police. The police took us to a detention center, and sent us back to North Korea on August 10, 1999, and were promptly taken to the Moon San detention center of the National Security Bureau.

There were ten women prisoners in the cell, and all of us had to take off our clothes, stark naked. We had to take off brassieres and panties. We were ordered to lift our arms sideways. We were ordered to stand up and sit down sixty times. They made us do that to get everything out supposedly hidden inside the body. They searched our hairs. They took some women and made them shake their breasts.

There was a pregnant woman among us. They said she was pregnant with a Chinese seed, and kicked the pregnant woman in the stomach with their feet. Another woman was holding a two-month old baby. They said the baby was also a Chinese seed, and beat him on the head with a book. Everybody screamed.

My daughter and I wore blue jeans at the time. They said the blue jeans were from the Yankees, and confiscated them. We were taken only in underwear to the so-called Discipline Center of the Security Bureau in Moo San City. Our daily meals there were composed of rotten flour paste in a pumpkin soup. We were forced into hard labor during the day, and were drilled as in the military in the evening. We had to fight off fleas, ticks, and bugs in the bed every night.

On August 14, 1999, I escaped from the camp when the guards were not looking. I had to run and walk 15 miles through the mountains on my bloated legs. I came back to Tumen River, and jumped into the river. It was rainy season, and the river was high. I was floating in the river, and lost consciousness. When I came back to, I found myself in a strange house. One old Korean-Chinese woman was looking down at me.

She told me that a Korean-Chinese youth saw a body floating in the river. He pulled the body out of the river, and it was me. I escaped from North Korea again, but I did not know where my older daughter was. My younger daughter was still back in the camp. I wanted to die thinking about them....I did not want to live.

I heard much later that my younger brother escaped from North Korea in August 1999 looking for his sister in China. He was arrested by the North Korean security agents, and was taken back to North Korea. They found out my brother met with South Koreans in China. He was charged as a political criminal for that and taken to somewhere nobody knows where. My daughter left behind was also beaten up severely when they found out I escaped.

My eighteen-year old daughter miraculously found me in Ryong Jeong City. She escaped again, crossed the Tumen River again, was taken to the human traffickers again, from Toh Moon to Dan Dong, from Dan Dong to Shen Yang, and then to some other places. She went through all that to find her mother. I despair even now when I think about what she went through to find me.

I will never forget July 25th. On that day, we were repatriated again and taken directly to Chong Jin Detention Center. We felt as if we were dead. We were taken to a cell full of fleas, ticks and bugs. Ticks were killing us. They were in my navel, they were in

between my fingers, they were in my ears, and they were all over me. When I woke up in the morning, several ticks fell off my body. They were as big as peas!

I guess all detention centers were the same, but the Chong Jin camp was where every prisoner was to die. We tried to sleep hanging on the windows like bats, but there were mosquitoes at the window. We were there only one month, but we saw things that we could not believe with our own eyes. One pregnant woman gave an early birth to a baby after only 8 months. The baby was wrapped in a blanket and was thrown out on the cold concrete floor. The baby was crying, and the mother was taken by the guards to somewhere. One woman got syphilis in China. Her inside had to be cleaned everyday with salt water.

On August 30th, we were being taken to the Security Bureau in Pyongyang. While the guards were dozing off, we escaped again. We spent two months at Chong Jin Railroad Station as adult “Kt-Che-Bees(street beggars).” We crossed Tumen River again on October 20, 2000. We met this guy, Taek, in Seung Sun Village of Hwa Ryong City. We lived in a cave in the cliff, and did whatever Taek ordered us to do. He wanted pumpkin seeds everyday, and we gave him pumpkin seeds everyday. One day, Taek told us we had to move to San Dong Province. We thought we were being sold again. We felt hopeless.

The Han Race in San Dong Province did not understand a Korean word. We boarded a train, and the train stopped at Cho Yang Chun Station. Fight broke out among the Hans, and we jumped off the train. We went back to Ryong Jeong City, now familiar to us. We stayed in Ryong Jeong for a while, and then moved to Kyo Joo City, where I got a job as manager at a Karaoke place. I was paid a salary there.

One day, five North Korean girls came to the Karaoke place, sold by human traffickers. They looked like my daughters. They were abused sexually everyday by the customers. I showed them the way how to get away from the place. On the day they escaped from the place, I placed an ad in the local paper. “Mother Cha Kyeong Sook is looking for her daughter!” In the ad, I left a short address where we could be reached.

Two months later, the miracle happened. My older daughter showed up. I did not know whether I was happy or sad at the sight of my daughter. My whole body began to tremble. I could not believe that three of us were finally together under the same roof. I cried. I cried to wash away all my pains, all my sorrows, and all the shame that I had to go through. I cried with my daughters. We will never part again! We will die together!

I could not cry forever with my daughters. I crossed Tumen River again, this time back to North Korea. I had to bring my son out this time. I brought my son out on March 6, 2003. My husband died already. I found my son at the No. 9 Orphanage in Pyongyang City. I did not cry when I found my son. I cried enough already with my daughters.

Six years. Six short years, or six long years. I became an old woman in that six years. My hairs turned gray. I left my six years of pain in China, and came to South Korea with my three children on June 10, 2003.

I feel sorry to my dead husband writing this story. You were the only husband to me. I was raped and abused by so many devils, and beg of you to forgive me. I had to live to save our children, but I cannot face my children with my eyes looking at them straight.

If I ever see my husband in the other side, I will kneel in front of him. I want to be his wife again. I want to pray for so many girls who suffered and wasted their lives in China and other countries.